29th Annual Write Women Back Into History
Essay Contest
Winning Essays

Best Essays, Grades 6-7

1. Grace Denner
New Hampton Middle School, New Hampton
Teacher: Erin Snyder
Subject: Margaret Wragg Sloss

"Each man is a unique individual, not even identical twins are wholly alike. By the Grace of God you are what you are. Glory in your selfhood, accept yourself, trust yourself, respect yourself. You have a right to be here and each of us has important work to do. Never, never indulge yourself in self pity or spend time comparing yourself with others. What is right for you may not be right for them and vice versa. Don't stand in your own shadow, get your little self out of the way, so your big self can stride forward." ~ Margaret Sloss

Margaret Wragg Sloss: A Woman of History

College. A higher education. A career. Back in the early 1900s, these words seemed nearly impossible for women to achieve. One woman changed all that. Margaret Wragg Sloss should be written into history because of her contributions to veterinary science and women's rights. Her early years, her struggle to earn a degree, accomplishments, and why she should be written into history, have made an impact on my life and the lives of others.

Margaret Wragg Sloss was born on October 28th, 1901. This was a time period when women were expected to stay home to cook, clean, and take care of children. Back then it was uncustomary for women to pursue a higher education and have a career. Margaret Wragg Sloss grew up with a father who pushed her to work hard and have an education. Her childhood home was across from the veterinary clinic at Iowa State University. Dad Gray, who worked for the clinic, became a friend to Margaret and allowed her to accompany him during his workday. Mr. Gray and her father's encouragement piqued her interest in a life beyond the traditional household tasks that other women led. She became totally dedicated to veterinary science; this was her dream.

Perseverance is a great quality that I see in Dr. Sloss, and she makes me feel like I can be anything that I want to be. She had applied to Iowa State for a PhD program and was rejected because she was female. Margaret researched and discovered that people could not discriminate based on gender when taking applications for college because of the initial land grant. To get a PhD she had to go the extra mile. Because of her persistence, she was accepted and became the first woman to earn a degree for this field. That has impacted women

and me everywhere by paving the way for all women who want to get a degree in science. Sloss led her life on the belief that she was “medically and scientifically minded,” which women can admire because we can think, “if she can do it, we can too.”

Margaret’s list of accomplishments didn’t stop after earning her degree. She was the first woman to graduate from ISU in veterinary science. Prior to her graduating, 0% of graduates were women. Because of her passion of veterinary science, currently, 48.6% of veterinary graduates at ISU are women. Margaret also founded the Women’s Veterinary Association. This organization has and will help women everywhere achieve their dreams of pursuing careers in veterinary sciences. Sloss also was the first female laboratory pathology technician at ISU. She broke many gender barriers and stereotypes. Sloss was a veterinary technician, a pathology instructor, assistant professor, professor, and in 1972 retired and became an emeritus professor. Sloss’s accomplishments have helped to empower women everywhere.

Margaret Sloss should be written into history because she was a great role model and inspiration to women everywhere. She has done many great things in the world of science and for women. She has made contributions to the society by working as a veterinary scientist and a women’s rights activist. I find her a role model because even when the odds were against her, she just did her own thing and succeeded at it no matter what other people said. In 50 years, people will remember her as one woman who stood out in a crowd because of her perseverance and integrity. She impacts today’s society by allowing women to go to college. Without Margaret Sloss, I wouldn’t have the opportunity to fulfill my dreams of going to college.

Now, college is usually taken for granted among women. Margaret has empowered us to think that anyone, male or female, can be successful by getting a science degree. On December 11th, 1979, Margaret Sloss died, but her legacy lives on as being a great scientist and a women’s rights activist. She never married or had children; her personal life was interwoven with her career. Margaret Wragg Sloss is a great scientist that has and will continue to affect my life and the lives of others.

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2. **Sophia Xiao**
   Pleasant Valley Junior High, LeClaire
   Teacher: Lyra Johnson
   Subject: Jane Shuttleworth

My Friend Jane, Protector of Iowa's Natural Habitat

Some kids know what they want to be when they grow up but their interests change. Jane Shuttleworth was one of those kids who grew up knowing what they wanted do. Jane is the Education Coordinator of the Iowa Lakeside Laboratory located at Lake Okoboji. She works with people of all ages, from four year olds to elderly seniors. She teaches them mostly about a wide range of subjects in natural science, including water protection, aquatic ecology, terrestrial ecology, insects, animal behavior, geology, weather, and even soils. She also teaches people how to restore ecosystems and how to protect species from extinction. She says it's the "best kind of learning 'cause it's not school." A musician and artist, Jane believes that it's easier for young kids to learn about science through art and music.

Currently, Jane is working with wetland restoration in Iowa. She showed me on a map how the wetlands in the Iowa county where she lives are being reduced. Because wetlands help filter the pollution in the water, its shortage results in more run off of sediment and chemicals from factories and farms into the river system. The polluted water damages natural habitats along the way down south, and caused the depletion of oxygen in three thousand miles of the Gulf of Mexico and forced the shrimp and fish industries there out of business. There are several solutions to this problem. The farmers can plant "buffers", or strips of land barriers of prairie grass, to soak up any extra nutrients and chemicals and prevent erosion. They can also leave some forest around the rivers to prevent the soil on the banks from eroding when it rains. The law does not require farmers to plant extra grass around their fields, and since corn can be turned into ethanol, a clean fuel, there is a demand for corn as both food and fuel. The price of corn then rises, and it is much harder and more expensive to persuade farmers to plant buffer strips or restore some wetlands. Iowa has posted online reports on how to reduce nutrient pollution and people like Jane are ramping up campaigns to raise awareness among the population about environmental concerns.

Jane's parents are influential supporters of arts and culture in the city of Cedar Rapids, where she grew up. Her mother, Mrs. Winifred Shuttleworth is both artistic and musical, and her father, an esteemed attorney, loves to play Mozart on the piano. "My dad", she says, "is analytical like a scientist". She grew up right next to nature, living right next to some woods and Indian Creek. She and her siblings played outside a lot and explored the woods. They would often go to a golf course that was behind the woods. As she got older, she noticed the changes in the creek water and how the humans impacted the natural environment. She went to Hampshire College in Massachusetts, where she had the opportunities to "create her own curriculum". She thought that "the most important lesson is to learn for yourself and to learn how to learn". She also pursued but did not complete a Ph.D. degree in Anthropology at the University of Minneapolis due to the unexpected retirement of a supporting faculty. Jane's heroes are Rachel Carson and Charles Darwin.

Some years ago, Jane lived in Panama and participated in a project run by a German scientist who raised “big and fat” iguanas with the idea that they could become meat supply for the local population. Called “the chicken of the trees”, these iguanas had extremely low rate of survival in nature because they are easily taken by other animals of prey when newly born. One in a hundred baby iguanas grows up to become an adult. The people are too poor to raise iguanas, as the scientist hoped, because zinc is needed for the cage but the locals would rather use zinc to roof their own houses. The project participants ended up asking Panama’s government to raise iguanas, since they had the resources.

Jane gets involved in many creative projects, including one of having a large group of people to line up and form the shape of an animal in the snow to be recorded from a plane overhead. They’ve done a turtle and a fish and this year she is planning on the snowy owl. The only problem is that there is not much snow left. Just today, she took some Girl Scouts on the ice and instructed them on the properties of water. She cut a hole in the ice and one of the girls stuck her leg in and ended up getting soaked to the hip.

Jane has had a great influence on my view on nature ever since my family’s visit with her family at Lake Okoboji three summers ago. Jane took us into the wetlands where we spent an afternoon catching frogs and toads and then letting them go. Afterwards, we went out to pick out some mulberries for dessert. She introduced me to nature up close and personal for the first time. She also took me canoeing on the sly for fear my little brother might feel left out. And we came back with bottles of Okoboji lake water that, according to her, had biological matter that might grow critters. When I returned to the Quad Cities, I took Dissection in summer camps. My interactions with the creatures at the lake got me wondering. I hope to get into medicine when I grow up.

I will never forget the fun I had with Jane in the outdoors. And I will work so that such chance is not spoiled for future generations. Jane Shuttleworth is an unsung heroine who has done and is doing a great deal to help better our world and its future. I am proud that she is my good friend.

3. Carolyn Frank
Home school, Ames
Teacher: Jennifer Frank
Subject: Sharen Brower

Sharen Brower: An Artistic Inventor

What would today be like without a biodegradable, eco-friendly ink? Would the waterways be polluted with disgusting chemicals? Would hundreds of factories be spilling hazardous waste into Iowa’s habitats? Fortunately, we don’t need to know this thanks to an Iowa artist named Sharen Brower. Sharen Brower is important to industries because she invented a recipe for ink that used one of Iowa’s most abundant crops: soybeans. Soy ink is a

good choice for printing companies because it is cheap, bio-degradable, and contains no harsh chemicals.

Ms. Brower was a teacher, but she opened an art studio in Newell, Iowa, where she soon had a large number of interested clients. As her popularity as an artist grew, she found herself in need of a better ink than the petroleum ink she was using. She needed an ink that was fast-drying, thin, vibrant, and that allowed her to work quickly for her customers. She looked online, in art fairs, on artist recommendation websites, and every where she could think of. Finally, after months of searching, Brower found a booth about soy ink at an art fair.

Soy ink was richer and brighter than watercolor inks. It lasted longer than acrylic ink. It was more vibrant in color than any petroleum inks, and it dried quicker than all the other inks she used. It seemed like the perfect ink, so she ordered a can from Flint Ink, a printing ink company in Plymouth, Minnesota. She tried painting with it, but, in irony to the information at the art booth, it was thick and gloppy, contained lumps of condensed material, and took forever to dry, so she tried experimenting. She added some turpentine to make it thinner, but her next problem was the smell caused by the turpentine. It stank.

Finally, Sharen Brower was successful. She got it to smell better (or not at all), but there was one problem; she didn't record her first recipe. She had to do it all over again. When she finally got it to work, she had an ink like the one that was described at the art fair. She gave her recipe to Flint Ink, and it started producing the revised product. Flint Ink discovered that she had patented her recipe and sued her for patent infringement. She won the case, after hiring the best lawyer she could find, and received the largest amount in damage awards ever given to an independent inventor: $48.7 million!

I think soy ink is the perfect ink for large scale industrial and independent use because I treasure the environment and animals. It is a lot less harmful than petroleum ink because it contains natural ingredients. Without Sharen Brower, who knows what our earth would be like. Foul, dirty rivers that ran by factories, polluting the downstream wilderness? I'm also thankful for the fact that most industries use soy ink, rather than using harmful ink for printing.

Sharen Brower deserves a place in history where few women are because she invented an ink that is eco-friendly, easy to use and made from Iowa's soybeans. She invented this ink without even considering its conservation benefits. Since she invented an ink that is advantageous to both animals and industrial artists, she can be considered an artistic conservationist. If Sharen Brower is important to both printing industries and conservationists, she should be important to everyday citizens.

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Best Essays, Grades 8-9

1. Dakota Lucht
Northview Middle School, Ankeny
Teacher: Linette Mace
Subject: Ada Hayden

Ada Hayden: Putting Iowa's Prairies Back on the Field

Personally, I love the outdoors. There just isn't any way to replicate those unique feelings one can receive when they simply step out and feel the breeze. Although I have never lived in the country, I have always at least had access to a park somewhere near my neighborhood. Similarly, as a Boy Scout I enjoy a deep appreciation for those few natural tracts of land whose preservation can be linked to the dedicated efforts of a numerically small group of individuals in the past century. This is why I feel that Ada Hayden, professor and long-time conservationist, should be penned back into the books so that future generations will read her name and remember. Hayden's legacy as the champion of Iowa's prairies should not simply fade away as the prairies themselves quite possibly would have if not for her astounding motivation.

Ada Hayden was born on August 14, 1884 on a farm just north of Ames, Iowa. Throughout her early years, she enjoyed spending time in the areas of prairie located near her home, taking plant samples and watching the wildlife. It is not surprising, then, that after her graduation from Ames High School in 1904 she went on to earn a Bachelor of Science Degree in the field of Botany in 1908 from Iowa State University. It should also be noted that she took part in a number of activities during her four years at the University; she was involved with the campus yearbook, literary society, and she even played on the Senior-Sophomore basketball team. Continuing her education, she received a Master of Science Degree from Washington University in 1910, another Master's Degree (this time from ISU), and finally a Doctor of Philosophy Degree from ISU in 1918. With this last achievement, she became the first woman and the fourth person overall to receive a Ph.D. from ISU. At a time when most women did not even receive a High School Diploma, Ada was excelling academically on levels impressive even by today's heightened standards. Now a well-established figure at the University, she became

an Assistant Professor in Botany and Plant Pathology at Iowa State in 1919, a position she would hold until her death in 1950.

As impressive as it all is, Ada's academic achievements consist of only a small portion of her momentous legacy. More important are her contributions to the preservation of our state's pristinely natural prairies. First, in 1919, she proposed setting aside certain areas of prairies as preserves. Her next opportunity didn't come until 1934, when she became Research Assistant Professor on the Agricultural Experiment Station at the University. For this post she traveled around the state to study the local birds, finally allowing her access to the prairies she loved most of all. Ada brought her case to public eyes through her speeches and writings. Her inspiration was easily perceived by those surrounding her. Dr. Lois Tiffany, an undergraduate during the same period Ada held a position at Iowa State, once stated "[Ada] walked with purpose, rather brusquely. She did her own thing in her own way". Ada Hayden was a strong woman who was not afraid to press the limits society placed upon those of her gender in that day.

Ada remained active in a variety of groups throughout her years at Iowa State, publishing many papers on her research. Her topics were also varied; everything from ecological findings to plant classification. In the early 1940s, she chaired a committee on the preservation of natural landscapes for the Iowa Academy of Science. During this time she made trips to twenty-two prairie tracts in 10 counties in search of appropriate areas for preservation. Soon afterwards, she published "The Selection of Prairie Areas in Iowa Which Should Be Preserved" in 1945. Perhaps her most notable publication, this work would have long-lasting effects on the natural ecosystems of our state's treasured plains.

Late in her career, Ada was appointed the Curator of the Herbarium at Iowa State. Starting in 1947, this meant she was in charge of all of the dried and pressed plants in the library. Upon her death on August 12, 1950, Ada had added over 40,000 new specimens to the Herbarium, an impressive total for the relatively short period she held the position. In recognition of her exertions, the Herbarium at the University was given the title of the "Ada Hayden Herbarium" in 1988.

At her death in 1950, only two of the prairies Ada had specifically targeted in her research had actually been preserved by the State. Yet, her work cannot be limited to these two areas; through her research and public advocacy, at least 26 separate sections of our state's native prairie can be linked back to Ada. In addition, her legacy can be remembered through the public's enjoyment of Ada Hayden Heritage Park in Ada's native Ames, Iowa. In 1967 she was inducted into the Iowa Conservation Hall of Fame. Clearly, we have much to thank her for.

Back to my original point, I, like many other Iowans, am a lover of the natural environments of our state. Ada Hayden was the right person who came at the right time to have the greatest effect. In her day, the level of most people's understanding on the subject of conservation was much lower than it is today. People were only just beginning to realize one of those frightening facts: As human beings, we have the powers available to us to cause permanent damage to the environment, with serious repercussions to our society. Although we still have a long way to go before we fully understand how we fit in with our natural

surroundings, thanks to certain individuals' work in the environmental sciences (such as Ada Hayden) we are able to enjoy some of the rare bits of natural scenery dotting the landscape. Let her legacy live on!

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2. Laci Droll
Iowa City West High School, Iowa City
Teacher: Jeff Finn
Subject: Christine Brus

Christine Brus: A WISE Woman

I fondly recall my own childhood dreams of becoming a cop, doctor, veterinarian, or a teacher when I grew up. However, being the director of a university science program wasn't one of them. I do know of someone who did, and so with this year's theme of celebrating women in science, technology, engineering, and math, I believe Christine Brus, the Director of Women in Science & Engineering (WISE) at the University of Iowa, deserves to be written into history for her contributions to these fields and beyond. It's obvious that women have made incredibly significant contributions to these fields, but those contributions aren't always recognized as publicly as those of men. I can think of few others that deserve this recognition more than Christine.

Christine Brus was born in Nebraska and has remained in the Midwest ever since, having lived in Iowa, Wisconsin, Minnesota, Michigan, and Nebraska, and she truly represents Iowa women through her invaluable work at the University of Iowa, directing the Women in Science & Engineering (WISE) program since October of 1998. This program aims to expand and improve opportunities for women in all fields of science, technology, engineering, and math, which is why she serves as a huge role model to me and women of all ages. Christine has said, "I truly love my job and feel like I make the most impact when I am able to build personal connections with the young women in the program." It's not often that we encounter women like Christine working in these fields.

Christine can be found at the forefront of other causes in our community as well. I'm an activist myself, and Christine inspires me to rise beyond the obstacles put before me. She's a passionate educator who has worked with underrepresented youth in grades K-12 and Higher Education, particularly women in science, technology, engineering, and math, student of color, and scientifically gifted rural youth. In addition, she has developed summer outreach institutes for K-12 students and educators and is an advocate for equity. When I interviewed Christine, she was adamant about her passion for helping her local community, although she has also worked in India, too!

Few have worked as hard for their success as Christine, and this is my favorite quality of her. Not only has she pushed beyond a year or two of college and started programs like WISE, but she has broadened and strengthened her knowledge through many years of education and experience. Some of this includes her undergraduate degree in Liberal Studies, a master's degree in Preventative Medicine and Environmental Health, certification and registration as a Cytotechologist through the American Society of Clinical Pathologists, work in pathology labs, coordination of large federally-funded research grants, and serving as the Director of Community Outreach and Education for a federally-funded Environmental Health Sciences Research Center on the University of Iowa's Oakdale Campus. Her determination and perseverance are incredibly admirable to me as a high-school student who strives to achieve her best.

It's clear that Christine Brus deserves to be written into history. She serves as an inspiration to so many people, especially young women like myself, and her tireless work to improve the STEM fields are invaluable. Women are not often recognized to the degree which they deserve, and Christine is an exemplary representation of this. Learning about her and her work has truly opened my eyes to all of life's possibilities, and I know she has done the same for countless others in her community and across the globe. Whether or not Christine is recognized through this contest, she will be etched into my own future and memories. As Gertrude B. Elion said, "Don't be afraid of hard work. Nothing worthwhile comes easily. Don't let others discourage you or tell you that you can't do it. In my day I was told women didn't go into chemistry. I saw no reason why we couldn't." As Christine would say..keep dreaming!

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3. Caleb Mark Gipple
North Mahaska Junior High, New Sharon
Teacher: Donna Boots
Subject: Dr. Patricia Quinlisk

Dr. Patricia Quinlisk: A Woman for the History Books

There are many female scientists in Iowa who have contributed many things to society. However, there is one woman who truly stands out to me; this woman is Dr. Patricia Quinlisk. In this essay, I will explain the major contributions that Dr. Quinlisk has made to the state of Iowa, the Midwest, the nation, and the world as the state epidemiologist for Iowa. She has helped people live happier, healthier lives all around the world.

Many people don't think about epidemiology or the people in the field who do it. Most people don't even know what it is. But in all honesty, epidemiology is all around you. When you bathe in clean water, wear a seat belt, wash your hands, and eat in a smoke free restaurant, all of those things are because of public health and epidemiology. Many people think they live healthy lives naturally, but they are healthy because of epidemiology. Epidemiology is the science of finding out why people are sick and dying and how to prevent it from happening.

In my interview with Dr.Quinlisk, she said she can remember how unsafe and dangerous the world was when she was growing up. She can remember standing in the car with no seat belts and she can remember when restaurants and other public places were filled with cigarette smoke. Dr. Quinlisk was born during the rise of polio. She got the vaccine when she was five years old. Over time, epidemiology has put an end to these dangerous risks. Technology has also changed epidemiology. Dr. Quinlisk can recall figuring things out with a paper and pen at the beginning of her career that she can now put into a computer to figure out.

When asked how she would like to be remembered in fifty years, Dr. Quinlisk stated, "As a person who helped people stay healthy." Dr. Quinlisk also would like to have inspired a person to enter the field of epidemiology. I believe many people will view her as an inspirational woman.

Growing up in Wisconsin, Dr. Quinlisk was always interested in science when she was a child; however, she did not get interested in epidemiology until she was an adult. It all started when Dr. Quinlisk went to Nepal for two years with the Peace Corps program. When she arrived in Nepal, she noticed that lots of the natives were getting sick and dying. The disease they were sick from was anemia. The natives did not know why the people were sick and they did not know how to treat the disease. So Dr. Quinlisk and others hiked all over the Himalayan

Mountains informing the natives about the disease. They also taught them how to find the disease and how to treat it. This action helped hundreds of people all around Nepal. This also got Dr. Quinlisk hooked on epidemiology.

She then went back to school to learn more about epidemiology. In her current position as the state epidemiologist of Iowa, she does many things. She gives several lectures at major universities like the University of Wisconsin, the University of Iowa, and Iowa State University. Through these lectures, Dr. Quinlisk inspires hundreds of students going into the fields of public health, microbiology, and community medicine. Dr. Quinlisk gives at least one lecture a week.

Dr. Quinlisk does not only teach in the United States, though. She has taught in England, Ireland, and Scotland, as well as Rome and Mongolia. Through these trips to other countries, Dr. Quinlisk has kept the world a healthier place. And she does not have to travel to teach others; she also writes publications that are read by epidemiologists around the world. Topics of her papers vary from the recent mumps outbreak in Iowa to the effects of flooding in Iowa.

In her day to day work, Dr. Quinlisk does many different things. One of these is working with the media. Dr. Quinlisk goes on the radio and television to explain causes of disease in Iowa. Many Iowans feel reassured when Dr. Quinlisk is on screen and can explain an outbreak. She also oversees outbreaks. Some past outbreaks Dr. Quinlisk has overseen include H1N1 influenza and whooping cough.

Dr. Quinlisk has also appeared before Congress on the topic of bioterrorism twice. In these appearances, Dr. Quinlisk informed the nation how to respond to these events and how to train people to respond. She shared her knowledge with Congress about why preparation for bioterrorism is important. These appearances before Congress have helped to prepare the nation to respond to bioterrorism, as funding was approved for training and response.

Dr. Quinlisk says she feels very lucky because she has met some great people and had many great opportunities in her career. She feels a need to help others because she feels so lucky. Dr. Quinlisk will not stop helping others after she retires. She also has had ideas of going back into the Peace Corps after her retirement.

Dr. Quinlisk is an inspiration to me because she unselfishly helps others all the time. She also inspires me because she keeps people healthy all over the state of Iowa. She is also inspirational because of her numerous contributions to Iowa and the world through teaching and writing. She also has helped the field of science and epidemiology by encouraging many people to enter those fields. These are just a few of the many amazing things Dr. Quinlisk has done in her astounding career. I think it is important for us to write Dr. Patricia Quinlisk into history.

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